



# Local firefighters aid wildland efforts

by Sean Summers  
Herald Staff Writer

Since Leadville/Lake County Fire-Rescue developed its wildland firefighting program in 2002, the agency has sent crews to fires across the country, built a self-sustaining mutual aid program and seized a variety of training opportunities.

This year, a total of eight Leadville/Lake County Fire-Rescue (LLCFR) staff members have been deployed to three wildfires in Colorado — the East Canyon Fire near Durango, the Pine Gulch Fire just north of Grand Junction and the Grizzly Creek Fire near Glenwood Springs.

Though this year's fire season started late, it has been busy and slightly abnormal for LLCFR's wildland crews, John Ortiz, LLCFR captain and wildland coordinator said.

While hot, dry fire conditions are not new, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the routine of years past. Large gatherings for information sharing at fire camps, communal meals and direct support in the form of donations from affected community members have all been halted as pandemic safety measures, Ortiz said.

Each fire season, LLCFR



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Leadville/Lake County Fire Rescue firefighters Alex Conlin and Fritz Rogowski carry fire-retardant wrap up a trail to cover a U.S. Forest Service building while deployed as wildland firefighters during the Grizzly Creek Fire.

determines if it has the staff and resources to contribute to wildland firefighting efforts across the country. If the agency decides it has the personnel, equipment and resources to spare while remaining appropriately staffed locally, LLCFR Chief Dan Dailey notifies the Rocky Mountain District Fire and Aviation Management Unit dispatch center in Pueblo.

Once LLCFR has declared its availability, crews are on standby for deployment anywhere they are needed. While the appropriate regional dispatch center often reaches out to departments in close proximity to fires that need additional resources, the crew can be called to anywhere in the country, Ortiz said.

When the wildland crew is dispatched to a call, the on-call members are alerted, they gather the necessary equipment and depart. According to Ortiz, crews are typically expected to respond within six hours for in-state calls.

The nature of deployments vary from fire to fire, though the structure is largely the same. LLCFR arrives in a self-contained engine with everything the crew may need to effectively help. From

there, the agency is assigned to a division of the firefighting effort.

Once assigned to a division, such as saw crew or burn barrier construction, the team usually remains in that role for the duration of their 14-day deployment, Ortiz said. Federal safety regulations mandate that crew members do not exceed 14 working days — time spent actively engaged in firefighting — per deployment.

While 14 days is the maximum number for active, on-site firefighting efforts, deployments may last up to a month with travel time and stalls in work, Ortiz said. Once the deployment ends, either as a result of a fire's containment or a crew's time limit expiring, the agency heads back to Leadville. In severe cases where prolonged aid is needed, LLCFR will coordinate crew changes to relieve firefighters who are at the end of their deployment limit.

LLCFR wildland crews have been deployed for a total of 60 days this summer. The extended trips and high-stress work environment take a toll

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# COVID-19 is confirmed within LCSD

by Rachel Woolworth  
Herald Editor

Lake County School District (LCSD) closed The Center Early Childhood Programs on Sept. 10 after receiving confirmation of two positive COVID-19 cases within the preschool's employee/student population. The district, in conjunction with Lake County Public Health Agency (LCPHA), is also responding to one probable case of COVID-19 at West Park Elementary School.

LCPHA instructed The Center employee(s)/student(s)



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A masked Lake County School District student tosses a football on the first day of school. The district is currently responding to confirmed cases of COVID-19 within its employee/student population.

who tested positive for the virus to isolate at home for a minimum of 10 days or until cleared by medical release. Members of the infected individuals' households who might attend or work at the school district were also asked to stay home.

LCPHA and LCSD then conducted contact tracing, identifying and notifying individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 through "close contact" at The Center and West Park. Close contact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, includes: face-to-

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